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CONNECTICUT DENTAL HYGIENISTS' ASSOCIATION, INC.

ADVOCATES FOR ORAL HEALTH MANAGEMENT

**Testimony to the Public Health Committee
Re: SB1 Connecticut Health First Initiative
January 31, 2007**

Senator Handley, Representative Sayers, and members of the Public Health Committee; My name is Celeste Baranowski and I am a Connecticut licensed, registered dental hygienist and the President of the Connecticut Dental Hygienists' Association, Inc. I would like to thank you for hearing today's testimony on Senate Bill 1.

The Connecticut Dental Hygienists' Association supports access to quality health care for all. We have been working diligently on the Department of Public Health's Access to Care Ad Hoc Committee. Here in Connecticut and nationally, we have been exploring ways to expand access to dental care.

"The mission of CDHA is to empower the profession of Dental Hygiene to improve the public's total health by ensuring access to quality care and advancing excellence in the art and science of dental hygiene."

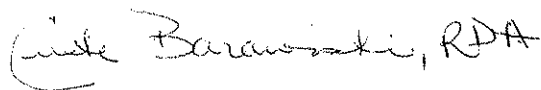
We applaud Senator Williams for including and supporting access to oral health care in his bill. It is imperative that dental be included in any health care plan for Connecticut's residents. CDHA is an adamant proponent of legislative measures designed to increase access to care. CDHA subscribes to the policy set forth by its parent organization, the American Dental Hygienists' Association, which calls for treatment plan options to be offered equally to all patients, regardless of economic status, third-party coverage or other remuneration/payment methods. We support the provisions contained in SB 1 that make it possible for more citizens of Connecticut to qualify for coverage under HUSKY, particularly children. As research that links an individual's oral health with overall, systemic health continues to emerge, the CDHA believes it is increasingly important to make preventive oral health care services accessible and affordable.

Tooth decay is the most chronic disease among children. Every dollar spent on prevention saves \$7 – \$42 in treatment costs. Lack of dental care leads to dental disease and many times acute infections needing hospital care.

CDHA is a long-standing supporter of increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates for oral health care services as a mechanism for increasing access to care. Increased rates of reimbursement to more closely reflect the actual market cost of services will make it more financially viable for providers to become a part of the HUSKY program. Connecticut is one of only eleven states that allow dental hygienists working in public health settings to be directly reimbursed under Medicaid. The proposed increase in reimbursement rates would make it easier for hygienists working in schools, nursing homes, clinics, and community health centers to provide care to a greater number of patients in need. HUSKY/Medicaid plays an important role in providing health insurance to thousands of children in Connecticut, who otherwise, would not have coverage. We need to include dental with ample reimbursement.

Improving the oral health of Americans through innovative solutions at the state level was a hallmark of "*A National Call to Action to Promote Oral Health Care*" issued by the U.S. Surgeon General in 2003. The report called on states to eliminate barriers that inhibit access to care, including increasing eligibility for Medicaid and raising reimbursement rates, and also encouraged states to invoke new health care models to improve workforce flexibility and efficiency. CDHA has demonstrated a steadfast commitment to those goals and is pleased to speak in support of SB 1, as Senator Williams' bill seeks to improve access to care for those most in need in Connecticut. Members of CDHA have experience and interest in, as well as dedication to dental public health and we stand ready to be of assistance as you go forward with this important work.

Thank you for your attention to this matter,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Celeste Baranowski, RDA". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Celeste Baranowski, RDH
CDHA President 2007
Connecticut Dental Hygienists' Association, Inc.